

Sally Borghesis

MICHIGAN CHILDREN'S INSTITUTE
and
OFFICE OF CHILDREN'S OMBUDSMAN

The following two paragraphs are the descriptions of purpose for the Michigan Children's Institute and the Office of Children's Ombudsman, taken directly from their respective websites.

Michigan Children's Institute

The Michigan Children's Institute was created to assure the proper care of children needing services from the state. The law established the MCI superintendent as the legal guardian for children committed to MCI when parental rights have been terminated. In 1935, the Michigan Legislature established the MCI Superintendent as the legal guardian for these children. The Superintendent is authorized to consent to adoption, emancipation, and marriage of MCI wards. Children who have been committed to MCI, whose permanency plan is other than adoption, usually remain under the MCI supervision until age 19.

Office of Children's Ombudsman

The Office of Children's Ombudsman is an independent government agency established by Public Act 204 of 1994. This Act gives the Ombudsman authority to investigate complaints about children in Michigan's child welfare system.

COMPARISON OF THE TWO AGENCIES

Although these two agencies have different purposes, they operate somewhat similar. They are both concerned with the well being of children placed within the foster care system. One from a complaint perspective and one from an adoption perspective.

In order to accomplish their purpose regarding the life of a child, they must investigate. The Ombudsman office states that they investigate less than 200 cases per year. The MCI office states that they investigate approximately 2700 - 2800 adoptions per year.

In the investigations, each office should go through a child's entire file. Both offices are looking at how the child came into care and the DHS/CPS contracted agency response to the needs of that child and the child's family.

While the Ombudsman's office function is to look for agency violations of case mishandling, the MCI office function is also to consider those same violations. Whether the Ombudsman may or may not have investigated a case, the MCI should look for agency violations within every adoption case.

If the MCI does not do this investigation, then agency mishandling would go unnoticed and a child's life would be wrongly changed forever.

The Office of Children's Ombudsman has 7 investigators, plus a staff of 5 other persons, and takes approximately 6 months to finalize a report.

The Michigan Children's Institute has 2 investigators, plus a staff of 2 other persons, and takes approximately 2 - 3 months to finalize a report.

CONCLUSION

In comparison to the Office of Children's Ombudsman, how can the Michigan Children's Institute possibly be considering all aspects of a child's case in half the investigation time while handling 86 % more cases with 33 % less staff?

It would have to be considered that the MCI office is rubber stamping DHS/CPS contracted agency recommendations without investigation into whether the agency has properly handled the case and that all recommendations are truly in the best interest of the child.

Therefore, what is the true purpose of the Michigan Children's Institute? The judge would have more information regarding the case. Yet the MCI Superintendent states that once a child's case comes to the Michigan Children's Institute, the judge is no longer in control of the case and the superintendent makes the adoption decision.

There is one very distinct difference between the Ombudsman office and the MCI office. That is, the Ombudsman is trying to right any wrong that may have been done and the information is useful in a court of law. The MCI makes a decision and it cannot be challenged in a court of law.

Where is the logic and common sense in this? Children's lives are far too precious to receive this type of treatment.